

## 3/19/2007 This Week in Congress

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March 19, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week, the House passed legislation to increase transparency and reduce government waste in federal contracting. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

### Introducing Legislation to Increase Access to Health Care for Rural Veterans

I introduced legislation this week to provide more health care options for veterans living in rural areas. Though we have been successful at opening several Veterans Affairs (VA) outpatient clinics in Kansas, not every community has a facility or is close to a VA hospital. The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act would enable the most underserved veterans enrolled in the VA health system to take advantage of existing rural health providers, such as local hospitals, community health centers and rural health clinics rather than traveling long distances to VA facilities. Additionally, the VA would be required to fill prescriptions written by non-VA doctors for these veterans.

Lack of access to VA care remains a real challenge for veterans living in rural areas and too often means these veterans are forgoing the care and treatment they need. The result is that rural veterans are in poorer health than their urban

counterparts. It is time to provide these veterans the access to health care they have earned.

[Click here to listen to my audio on this topic and learn more about this legislation.](#)

### Army Announces Most Fort Riley Projects to Move Forward

The Army notified me on Friday that it has decided to move forward with most military construction projects at Fort Riley despite limited funding. I recently joined other members of the Kansas delegation in asking the Secretary of the Army to prioritize projects at Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth following the passage of the federal spending bill for 2007 that under funded Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commitments. I voted against this spending bill because it put at risk nearly \$375 million in Kansas projects.

It is imperative that projects at our Kansas military posts remain on schedule, so the announcement by the Army is a step in the right direction. Most of the projects at Fort Riley will be able to proceed, but a major project at Fort Leavenworth is on hold. We still have much work to do and I am committed to seeing that full funding is restored so the remaining projects at our Kansas military installations can move forward and the needs of our soldiers and their mission can be met.

[Click here to read the full press release and see the specific military construction projects being funded at Fort Riley.](#)

### Speaking to the House about the Challenges of No Child Left Behind

I recently spoke to the U.S. House of Representatives about the challenges and pressures many educators are experiencing in the classroom due to the No Child Left Behind law. It is important that my colleagues in Washington, D.C., understand the realities that so many dedicated professionals are experiencing as they educate our children.

[Click here to view my speech and read my editorial about this topic.](#)

#### Working to Improve Affordable Housing Access for Soldiers

I joined Senator Pat Roberts this week in introducing the Military Access to Housing Act to remove barriers for Kansas military families to access affordable housing. Current rules require the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to account for the housing allowances of military men and women when determining if a family qualifies for low-income housing. This is inconsistent with guidelines for civilian recipients of government assistance and often eliminates military families from qualifying for this type of housing. This legislation will fix this by removing the basic housing allowance from the formula for determining eligibility for low-income housing. There is no reason that our soldiers should be discriminated against, especially when it comes to basic needs like housing.

[Click here to read more about this issue.](#)

## Recognizing the Community of Collyer with Building Better Communities Award

On Friday, I was in Collyer to attend one of the community's famous Lenten Fish Fry events and to present residents with a Building Better Communities award for continuing efforts to sustain and revitalize their community.

Formed in September 2004, the Collyer Community Alliance has driven revitalization efforts in this town of 133 people. The Alliance has more than 200 paid members and conducts fundraising activities to obtain financing for community initiatives. Last year, the Collyer Café opened in the refurbished Saint Michael's Convent. The alliance purchased the convent and the community donated well over 1,000 volunteer hours to the project. The Alliance further promotes Collyer by maintaining a website at [www.collyerks.com](http://www.collyerks.com) that includes ongoing development projects, fundraising activities and community events.

[Click here to read more about the community of Collyer and my Building Better Communities award.](#)

## Kansas Farm Bureau Visits Washington, D.C.

This week, the Kansas Farm Bureau County Presidents were in Washington, D.C. I had the opportunity to speak to this group of Kansas leaders about progress on the 2007 Farm Bill, the opportunity for agriculture disaster assistance to pass Congress and Farm Service Agency office closings across the state. It was good to see so many Kansans here speaking on behalf of the agriculture community.

## Kansan Testifies about Food Stamp Program before House Ag Subcommittee

Again this week, Kansans were well represented in the House Agriculture Committee. Gary Brunk of Topeka, Executive Director of Kansas Action for Children, testified before the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry, of which I am a member. He spoke about the food stamp program and its impact on children's nutrition. Mr. Brunk shared that this program is vital in keeping low-income children healthy. The food stamp program is up for renewal this year as part of the 2007 Farm Bill.

## Stopping in Junction City to Promote Read Across America

En route back to Washington, D.C., on Monday, I stopped at the Larry Dixon Center for Innovative Studies in Junction City to read to pre-kindergarten students. I read "Minerva Louise" to the students and talked about the importance of reading. Thank you to Stephanie Holloway for the invitation to join the students.

## First District Listening Tour to Conclude in April

This week, I visited Oakley and Wallace. I will be completing this year's listening tour in April while Congress is not in session. The details of the remaining four counties will be posted on my website as they become available.

## In the Office

Kansas Farm Bill Coalition representatives were in to present the group's consensus agenda for the 2007 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill Coalition is made up of 21 agriculture organizations from across the state. In with the group were Dennis Hupe of Topeka representing Kansas Soybean Association, Dana Peterson of Manhattan and David Schemm of Sharon Springs representing Kansas Wheat, Keith Miller of Great Bend representing Kansas Farm Bureau and his brother, Maurice Miller of Garden City.

Hutchinson Mayor Dave Razo and City Manager John Deardoff were in to give me an update on the local reverse osmosis water treatment plant project. Tom Kanatzar, Dan Porter and Bob Wing of Kansas City; Kathy Elkins and Mike McMillen of Lawrence; and Matt Jackson of Junction City were in with the International Association of Firefighters to talk about legislation important to firefighters in Kansas.

Keith Gurwell of Iola and Ron Carlburg of Humboldt were in representing the Boiler Makers to talk about labor, trade and environmental issues. Steve and Denise Riegel of Ford were in on behalf of Cenex Harvest States to discuss agriculture, trade, energy, water and immigration issues. Kenlon Johannes and Dennis Hupe of Topeka, Gary Robbins and his family - Kim, Tanner, Kassidy and Stephani - of Emmet, and Lance Rezac of Onaga were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to present the group's farm bill priorities. Also in with the group was Bob Henry of Robinson representing the American Soybean Association.

Kay Julian of Leawood was in with the Multiple Sclerosis Society to discuss research and the importance of having Medicare cover mobility devices. Regan Bartels, Justin Juenemann, Cody Kennedy, Tad Thompson and Megan Wagner of Phillipsburg; Jonathan Owens of Elkhart; and Timothy Setter of Dorrance were in Washington, D.C., participating in the People to People educational program and visited my office to learn more about my role in Congress. Bill Bolin of Wichita and Patty Richardson of Dodge City were in representing area economic development groups to share success stories and advocate for continued support.

Charles Ayers of Leoti, Chairman of the Board of Sunflower Electric, was in to discuss captive shipping on the railroads as it relates to coal fired power plants. Michael, Rekha and Kesar Sharma-Crawford, Erik Crawford and Kursten Phelps of Overland Park; Joann Lopez of Olathe; and Roger McCrummen of Prairie Village were in with the American Immigration Lawyers Association to talk about immigration reform proposals in Congress. Justin and Lindsey Knopf of Gypsum were in to discuss agricultural issues and tour the Capitol building.

City Commissioners Lynn Peterson and Judy Leyerzapf of Abilene were in to talk about recruiting physicians to rural communities and Abilene's expansion due to the influx of troops stationed at Fort Riley. Bob Fessler of Kansas City was in with Lamar Advertising to discuss the next highway bill reauthorization and issues facing the highway billboard industry. Mayor Jim Kessler and his wife Kathy, Commissioners Tom Myers and Bobbie Alger, and City Attorney Blaise Plummer were in representing the City of Emporia to tell me about their efforts to lengthen the runway at the airport and the need for more adequate reimbursement from Medicare for ambulance services.

In representing Kansas Municipal Utilities were Ken Arnold of Gardner, Don Gaeddert of Larned, Colin Hansen of McPherson, Brad Mears of Holton, Bob Porter of Wellington, Randy Riggs of Chanute, Brian Silcott of Sterling and Colin Whitley of Winfield. In from Kansas City with the group were Loretta Colombel, Joe Dick, Darrell Dorsey and Bob Milan. The group talked about issues facing municipal utilities in Kansas.

Salina People for Peace were in to discuss several defense and veteran related issues, including the war in Iraq, the Peace Tax Fund, School of Americas and treatment of our veterans. I appreciate the advocacy efforts of Angela Sidener, Randy and Sharon Lister, Jim Sager, Paul Daniels, Martin Bates, Janie Stein, Ellen Kling and Phil Rhoads. Monte Strait, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Kansas City Division, stopped in to brief me on FBI activities in Kansas and neighboring states.

Dr. Howard Rodenberg of Topeka was in with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to discuss the importance of public safety preparedness and the need to support rural healthcare programs. Rocky Nichols of Topeka was in with the Disability Rights Center of Kansas to advocate for special education programs. Ken Willard of Hutchinson and Steve Abrams of Arkansas City, members of the Kansas State Board of Education, were in to discuss No Child Left Behind.

David Kensinger and Pat Hubbell of Topeka and Kirk Hawley of Pittsburg were in with Watco Companies, Inc. to talk about the short line tax credit along with providing reliable service to railroad customers in rural areas. Jack and Tillie Alexander, Tuck Duncan and Janlyn Nesbett-Tucker of Topeka; Ron Straight of Hays; Jay Banasiak of Wichita; and Lisa Loeb of Hutchinson were in representing the Kansas Public Transit Association to stress the need for public transit dollars to Kansas that help provide bus service in many communities in our state.

Junction City officials were in this week to describe the many challenges and opportunities resulting from the growth of Fort Riley. They highlighted a need for more self-help housing, the increased presence of the bioscience industry in their city, and the new quality of life initiatives that are developing to make Junction City an even more welcoming place for families and visitors. In with the group were City Manager Rod Barnes, Assistant City Manager Mike Guinn and his wife Susan with Geary County Schools, Mayor Terry Heldstab and his wife Peggy, Vice Mayor Mike Rhodes, Public Relations Director Carol Gould and Sam Robinson, Director of the Junction City-Geary County Military Affairs Council. City Commissioners Ken Talley, Mick Wunder and Jack Taylor were also with the group.

David Wilson of Overland Park and Maren Turner of Lawrence were in with AARP to discuss their upcoming campaign entitled "Divided We Fail." Wendy Parent of Oskaloosa was in with the National Rehabilitation Association to talk about the need for vocational rehabilitation programs that help disabled people gain employment. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) representatives were in to discuss environmental issues currently impacting Kansas. The EPA Regional Administrator in charge of Kansas, John Askew of Kansas City, was in, as was Rich Hood of Lenexa.

Leaders from Manhattan were in to discuss transportation, child care, housing and quality of life issues the community is working to enhance. I met with City Manager Ron Fehr, Deputy City Manager Diane Stoddard, Assistant City Manager Jason Hilgers, Mayor Bruce Snead, Mayor Pro Tem Tom Phillips and Commissioners Mark Hatesohl and Ed Klimek.



Members of the University of Kansas Student Senate were in to discuss the need to lower student loan interest rates and the need to support study abroad opportunities for college students. In with the group were Assistant Treasurer Austin Kelly, Senators Adam Hurly and Ian Staples and Luke Thompson, all of Lawrence. Kansas State University Student Body President, Lucas Maddy of Manhattan, also came by. Several other Kansans stopped by my office this week to visit, including Brenda and Jim Douly of Jewell, Dennis Lutgen of Beloit, Sarah Skelton of Wichita and Karen Needles of Pittsburg.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Chris Schneider of Schoenchen, Jacque Hobbs of WaKeeney, and Shayla Lowry and Janice Erichsen of Junction City. Frank and Martha Leibham of Quinter were in, as were Roger and Susan Griffin of Lyons with their daughter, Stevie Magnuson. In from Alma were Richard and Darcy Feyh and Milton Stuewe, Jr., and his wife, Laura. Jim and Linda Essmiller of Great Bend, Tyler and Becky Rider of Ness City, and Molly Novascone of Wichita also came by for a tour. I also met with Cory Beougher of Downs and students from Lakeside High School in Downs.

Very truly yours,

Jerry